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INFLUENCING DECISIONS

♀ *Information about issues for the provincial election*

Influencing Decisions provides information about issues that need to be discussed by those running for provincial government. It is important to know where the candidates stand on issues important to women.

The topics that are included in this booklet were raised with the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues at our regional public forums, meetings with individual women's groups across the province and during our work on *Challenges and Choice: A Presentation to the Royal Commission on Learning*.

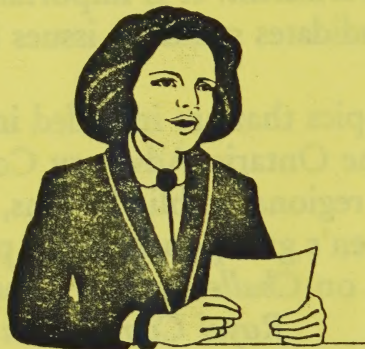
- ♀ Know the issues
- ♀ Ask questions
- ♀ Push ahead your concerns
- ♀ Vote on election day

You can influence decisions!

ONTARIO ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WOMEN'S ISSUES
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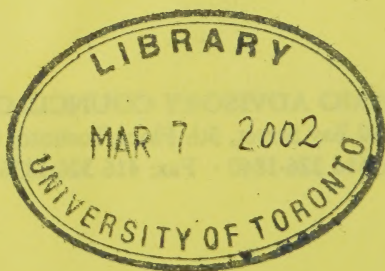
WOMEN IN POLITICS

- Women are under-represented as candidates.
- In the last provincial election (1990) the percentage of women candidates for each party was:
 - 30% - NDP Party
 - 20% - Liberal Party
 - 15.4% - PC Party
- Parties tend to nominate women in difficult to win constituencies, such as those held by the leader of another party or where their parties are not in a competitive position.
- In 1990, 29 of the 130 legislative seats were won by women.
- On a positive note, following the 1990 election, the Ontario cabinet included 11 female ministers out of 26 members.



♀ How will your party encourage women to be candidates?
What assistance will you provide?

♀ Are you committed to having a minimum number of female candidates?



WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

- Women's full and equitable participation in the economy is restricted by the lack of initiatives for balancing work and family responsibilities.
- The majority of working women have school-aged children.
- Women bear most of the responsibility for family care and domestic duties, including child and elder care.
- On average, women earn 70 cents for every dollar a man earns.
- A government committed to addressing the needs of women must also be committed to developing viable, women and family friendly, alternative economic plans with long term sustainable benefits for all. Such plans must include a variety of options for different ages, stages and circumstances and must also recognize women's multiple roles.



♀ What are your party's policies on work and family issues?

- Will you amend the Employment Standards Act to include paid leave days for family responsibility?
- Do you support flexible work arrangements? How will you implement them?

♀ How will you reduce the wage gap?

♀ What are your party's plans/timetable for non-profit childcare reform legislation which addresses: affordability, accessibility and flexibility?

JOB TRAINING AND JOB CREATION

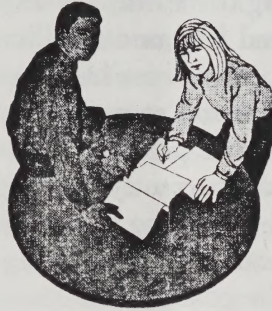
- Job training programs are often underfunded, of variable quality not always accessible or available. Language barriers such as English-only communication strategies and materials that are loaded with "bureaucratise" fail to reach many women.
- Ontario's job creation programs focus mostly on infrastructure improvements – an area in which few women work.
- We cannot rely on the existing job market for re-trained workers - new jobs need to be created.
- To date, *jobsOntario Training* has placed 29,000 long-term unemployed people in jobs with training – only one-third of the participants who found work were women.
- Women living in rural and isolated communities face significant barriers when accessing the training programs, they include lack of appropriate childcare, timing of programs, lack of services, little or no transportation and traditional male attitudes.



- ♀ What are your party's plans for developing training and job creation programs that are relevant to women's lives?
- ♀ How will you ensure that the training programs developed are appropriate to, and meet the challenges of, the future economy?

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

- On September 1, 1994, employment equity became law.
- Employment equity legislation ensures fair and barrier-free participation in the workforce (hiring, promotion and training) for women, visible minorities, people with disabilities and native people.
- The Employment Equity Act covers about 17,000 employers in Ontario and affects about three-quarters of the workforce.
- There is backlash to employment equity.



- ♀ How will you facilitate the implementation of employment equity?
- ♀ What plans does your party have for educating the public to recognize the intention of this legislation and to address the backlash and promote cooperation?

WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAMS

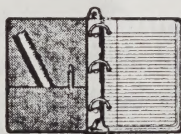
- Women's Studies promote students' awareness of women's issues pertaining to health, poverty, family, education, political participation and law among others.
- Most Ontario universities have undergraduate programmes in Women's Studies and some are developing graduate programmes.
- Women who are currently in university will be among the leaders of tomorrow's society. In light of this, the government should:
 - encourage the promotion of Women's Studies courses and approaches in the community college system;
 - provide specific scholarships to Women's Studies programmes at the university level;
 - establish an endowed Women's Studies Chair at each university in Ontario
 - earmark funds for Women's Studies research and application of Women's Studies theory to other disciplines; and
 - maintain closer contact with Women's Studies scholars and researchers for the purpose of developing policies appropriate to women.



♀ What is your party's commitment to Women's Studies programmes in post-secondary education?

CURRICULUM

- Gender fair education promotes consciousness of the differing experiences of males and females in society: it is a curriculum and approach designed for men and women, and free of ethnocentricity, racism, sexism and classism.
- Most students do not have access to women's studies courses.
- Women are under-represented in most texts as both authors and subjects of discussion. Little importance is accorded those women who have been outstanding, and whose presence would be an encouragement to young girls as they plan their futures. In addition, when women are mentioned, their contributions are marginalized, trivialized, or inaccurately reported.
- Research has demonstrated that the traditional ways of teaching mathematics and sciences discourages girls to pursue studies in those subjects. If girls do drop math and science courses early, they often do not have the necessary prerequisites to pursue these subjects and other technological courses at the post-secondary level or through training programs.
- School counsellors should be strongly advised and trained to explore non-traditional fields for women and to suggest them to women students in their schools.



- ♀ What is your party's policy on gender fair education? Will you incorporate it into the curriculum?
- ♀ Will you implement women's studies programs into the curriculum at the elementary and secondary level?

♀♀ SEXUAL ORIENTATION LEGISLATION ♂♂

- Lesbian and gays are the only groups that are legally discriminated against due to 79 statutes in provincial legislation which exclude same-sex relationships.
- Lesbian and gay couples are active participants in Ontario's economy and should be granted equal rights to heterosexual couples.
- Lesbian and gay couples have family responsibilities that must be fully recognized under the law.

♀ What is your party's policy on sexual orientation legislation?

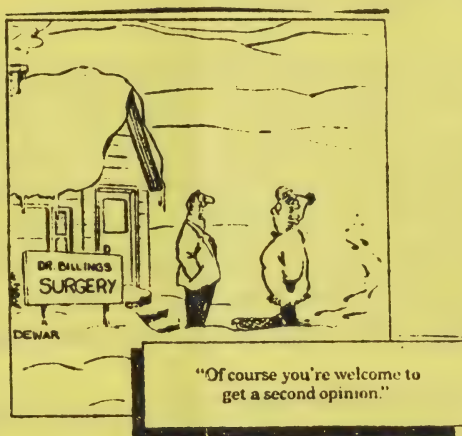
ABORTION

- Access to abortion services is unevenly distributed across the province.
- Surgical abortions are not readily available outside large urban areas of the province, especially in northern Ontario. In over 50% of Ontario counties, women needing abortions must travel outside their areas to obtain abortions.
- Four free-standing abortion clinics have been funded by the Ontario government in the last 4 years - all in Toronto. A fifth one is scheduled to open in Ottawa soon.

♀ What will your party do to ensure that all Ontario women have equal access to abortion services?

HEALTH CARE

- We are currently witnessing a fundamental transformation in our health care system. Some of these changes have included less in-hospital care, shorter stays when admitted, and discharged clients who go home requiring more complex care.
- Community services have not filled this care "gap". Instead, it is largely women -- as wives, mothers, daughters and friends who are providing this care. This has an impact on their health and their employment.
- Women's access to services, particularly in rural Ontario is limited. Where no services are available, women in remote areas may have to travel great distances for medical attention. Travelling is expensive, time-consuming and inconvenient, taking patients far from family. Patients have to accept medical care from doctors they have never seen before and may never see again.
- Research indicates that there is a link between environmental hazards and people's health. For example, concern is growing among women that there is a relationship between the environment and breast cancer.



- ♀ How will your party address the inequities for women as they fill the care "gap".
- ♀ How will you ensure that women's health care is not sacrificed in a time of severe fiscal restraints?
- ♀ What is your party's plan to improve access to health care for women in rural and isolated communities?
- ♀ How will you clean-up the environment?

What is the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues

Council's mandate is to advise the Ontario government through the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues on matters pertaining to the achievement of economic, social and legal equality for women; to respond to requests from the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues; to hold on meeting annually in each of the six Ontario regions* with the purpose of gathering the views of women on issues of concern in that region and exchanging information among women about government activities; to hold one full Council meeting annually in Toronto at which time the Council will have the opportunity to meet with the Premier and other Cabinet members.

There are 15 members, including the president, all appointed on a part-time basis to terms of not more than three years. Except for the president, members are appointed from nominations by individuals from groups within each region. Three members come from both the northwest and northeast, and two from each of the southwest, eastern, central and Metropolitan Toronto regions. A permanent office is located in Toronto, staffed by an executive officer, communications officer and administrative assistant.

Council member meet with women's groups in their regions to discuss issues of particular concern to women in that area and to advise women of government activities. Members maintain contact with local women's groups and respond to requests for information and identify issues as they arise for the Council president.

Our newsletter, *Council Update*, published at least once a year, is mailed to approximately 12,000 individuals, women's groups, business, libraries, educational institutions, government agencies and legislators.

*northwest, northeast, southwest, central, east, Metropolitan Toronto



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